

Washington, D.C. - Today, as part of her continuing efforts to address and help families confront internet-based crimes, U.S. Congresswoman Melissa Bean (IL-8) re-introduced the SAFER NET Act (*Safeguarding America's Families by Enhancing and Reorganizing New and Efficient Technologies*). Bean and lead cosponsor, Congressman Baron Hill (IN-9), were joined by 48 additional Members who demonstrated their support of the legislation by signing on as original cosponsors. Nationally and internationally, an ever-increasing number of children and adults are utilizing online resources every day. While the internet offers tremendous opportunities, users must be aware of the potential risks and the precautions that are important to protecting themselves and their families.

SAFER NET (H.R. 1008) will streamline and improve existing efforts to educate families and consumers while promoting internet safety. This groundbreaking legislation will establish an *Office of Internet Safety and Public Awareness*, a clearinghouse and primary portal to internet safety resources. Through its website and outreach efforts, the *Office of Internet Safety and Public Awareness* will provide easy access to better organized, understandable, and up-to-date information on safe internet use.

“The internet provides kids access to the world, but it can also bring a world of dangers into their homes. With more than 87% of teens using the internet on a regular basis, this isn’t an issue we can afford to ignore,” Bean said. “SAFER NET will help families protect their children from online predators by improving the accessibility, coordination and efficiency of the many government resources that already exist for that purpose.”

“I would like to thank Congresswoman Bean for introducing this important piece of legislation that will protect our families,” Hill said. “Too many families are unaware of the dangers lurking on the internet. Yes, the internet provides a wealth of information, but people also need to know what kind of threat the internet poses when people misuse it.”

The *Office of Internet Safety and Public Awareness* will give internet users unprecedented access to information about identity theft, cyber crime, and child predators as well as countermeasures and “best practices” for consumers and businesses alike. Grants to promote safe internet use will also be distributed through the *Office of Internet Safety and Public Awareness*. Creation of the office will require a relatively minor reorganization of the numerous, although splintered, efforts already committed to combating internet-based crime.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one in five children (10 to 17 years old) is sexually solicited online. A report by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children indicates that as much as 20% of all pornographic activity on the internet may involve children. The report also estimates that 40% of all predators arrested for sexually victimizing children were dual offenders and of that group, 15 % were caught by undercover agents posing as minors

online.

Individuals looking for potential child victims online have no difficulty finding them. It is quite common for these individuals to frequent “kids only” chatrooms and to communicate with children who unwittingly divulge personal information.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, households with internet access increased from 26.2% to 53% and from 26.5% to 54.7% in the U.S. and Illinois respectively between 1998 and 2003.

“The SAFER NET ACT”

Safeguarding America’s Families by Enhancing and Reorganizing New and Efficient Technologies

Online threats and internet crimes are a national problem deserving a national response. However, there is currently no single entity at the federal level charged with making internet safety a national priority.

Despite the fact that many federal, state, local and non-profit entities, along with commercial web sites, financial institutions, and tech companies all already provide excellent information regarding cyber crime (ID theft, risky activities like My Space, etc.)—the vast majority of these resources are unknown to Americans.

The FTC has been conducting some work with other agencies and private companies to promote online safety (www.onguardonline.gov), however, this resource could be improved to operate as a real national coordinator and promoter of internet awareness. The goal of this bill is to streamline existing and successful efforts to educate consumers and promote internet safety awareness.

To coordinate a national response to online threats and promote internet safety by using and streamlining existing public and private resources, SAFER NET would:

- * Create a new *Office of Internet Safety and Public Awareness* at the Federal Trade Commission explicitly responsible for improving public awareness and education about internet safety. This office would be the primary federal contact on internet safety, serving as a resource and clearinghouse for consumers, the industry, and other internet safety initiatives. It would also work with other entities (federal, state, local, private) to reduce redundancy and promote best practices for promoting and ensuring internet safety. The office would also report to Congress annually on the state of internet safety, emerging threats, and the costs to the economy.
- * Launch a national public awareness campaign to educate Americans about online threats and how best to protect themselves and their families from being the victims of online predators, financial schemes, ID theft, and more.
- * Authorize federal grants to support efforts to promote internet safety conducted by qualifying

entities like schools, non-profit organizations, state and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and businesses.

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